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## ABSTRACT

Outdoor education is a "process of education, a way of teaching which uses the outdoors as the major education facility and which actively involves students in the real world situations where learning takes place." Population shifts now place more than 85 per cent of the population in an urban society. If children from these environments are to develop a sense of understanding of the natural environment which sustains their lives in the man-made environment of the city, they should be able to appreciate and participate in recreational opportunities that abound in the outdoor environment. Resources and facilities for outdoor education for this largely neglected audience must be within their experiential background and should focus on all aspects of urban life. Experiences in the natural environment and in the man-made environment should be made available to all children. Urban outdoor education camps, exchange programs among rural and urban children, and professional education for outdoor educators can be developed to improve the quality of education and life for all students. Recreation skills and facilities which can flourish in the inner city must also be developed. Effective outdoor education will help children and citizens to realize that they must improve their cities and create a type of urban beauty to match the beauty of nature. (CJ)

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Keynote Address  
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OUTDOOR EDUCATION IN THE 80'S - THE URBAN CHALLENGE

First off, let me say that I'm delighted to see that the recreation majors at Cortland are offered this background in outdoor education - my presence here, speaking on the topic of outdoor education, is testimony to the foresight of Charlie Lewis, Dr. Harlan Metcalf, Marcia Carlson, George Fuge, and Ron Bover, all recognized as leaders in the field. I have always believed that the more arrows in your employment quiver, the better, as you seek employment in this recreation field. The allied disciplines of outdoor education, environmental education and school camping legitimately fall under the recreation umbrella. In truth, recreation schools that don't provide this training are dealing fraudulently with their students. The major sources of employment opportunities for recreation graduates no longer are municipal recreation departments or school systems - but rather, the huge, national governmental agencies - National Parks & Forests, BLM - and others. Similarly, State Parks, Outdoor Education centers, year-round camps and privately operated wilderness recreation trips are the new employers - for men and women.

Given this, however, which suggests a closeness and working understanding of the vast natural resources of our parks and forests - why am I here to talk with you about the urban challenge: The answer is simple, but often overlooked.

SP 017 178

When L.B. Sharp defined Outdoor Education as being "education in, about and for the outdoors," he probably gave what amounted to one of the most seriously understated education definitions of all times. His early concepts are now flowering into the fruits of interesting educational innovation. Today, outdoor education is a "process of education, a way of teaching which uses the outdoors as the major education facility and which actively involves students in the real world situations where learning takes place." And, note what I said - not wilderness - but in real world situations.

A recital of the important trends in American Education today serves to underscore the importance of outdoor education. What are these trends? Schools without walls, the peripetetic student, alternative schools, community-based education, real life experiences, work programs for credit, etc. They all involve education away from the traditional classroom. They say that it is possible, and even desirable, to educate away from the four walls of the classroom. It is a process of education, not necessarily of school.

Interestingly, innovation in American Education usually comes from those school systems whose children probably least need it - and the case is striking when it comes to outdoor education. Twenty and thirty years ago, the most privileged suburban school districts were those whose kids were exposed to this then innovative and exciting form of education - Edgemont in Scarsdale, New York; Newton, Massachusetts; Battle Creek, Michigan; Shaker Heights - Great Neck in New York - kids who traveled with their parents, who attended summer camps, and who were exposed to many enriching opportunities in their schools. These were the kids who were offered outdoor education. And, this trend has continued. I daresay there's hardly one of you who grew up in a suburb of any city in New York who didn't go for some sort of an outdoor

education experience to Ashokan, Weeks, Rogers, Green Chimney, Frost Valley, PEEC or similar such places. But, what about inner city New York City kids - I suspect that less than 10% have had the chance - and I think that figure is high.

Just for the heck of it, let's see if I'm right. At some time or another in your elementary or junior high school, how many of you did go away for three, four or five days with your class to this kind of a facility? Well, in recent years, several phenomena have occurred which strongly suggest somewhat of a shift of emphasis. For one thing, there has been a population shift which now places more than 85% of our population in an urban-centered society - not necessarily cities, but communities which fall under all the influences of city life - economic, social and cultural. For another, urban and suburban school districts have experienced severe fiscal crises - and virtually all enrichment programs are endangered. For another thing, the federal monies for these kinds of pilot and demonstration programs have dried up, and the stimulant, therefore, has disappeared. The new administration has this kind of program cutting as a major plank in its platform. Transportation costs are now such that there is always serious thought before a principal or superintendent authorizes buses to carry kids to seemingly exotic wilderness areas for study.

But, the most compelling reason for change is that the underserved and undereducated live in these central urban centers - that's where the need is - and that's where the audience is. If we ever expect these kids to develop a sense of understanding of the natural environment which sustains their life in the man-made environment of the city - to appreciate and participate in the recreational opportunities that abound in the mountains and streams that

surround them, and to develop a sense of appreciation for the vast cultural, historic, and recreational possibilities that do indeed exist in the cities - then programs must be designed that talk the language, and meet the needs, of this isolated and neglected audience - this city audience; case in point 1 million school kids go to school in NYC - as much as in the rest of the state together.

Twelve years ago, I conducted a study, the results of which were reported widely in a book. It was called City to Country and the major thesis was that city kids needed to be exposed to educational and recreational opportunities which could generally be found in natural camping areas. I'd like to think that this report played some part in getting literally thousands of city kids out to school outdoor education camps. However, because of the factors which I enumerated above, I realize now that I didn't go far enough - that there was a one dimensional quality to what I was espousing. In the last four or five years - happily - there has been a movement on the part of national agencies which have been clearly identified in the past with wilderness management to shift some of their efforts to the cities. The NPS now has major parks inside the cities of New York and San Francisco. My own agency, Cooperative Extension, so long identified only with agricultural and rural interests, now has a major program in New York City. And, as a recent New York Times story reported only last week, the Boy Scouts are now tailoring their programs to the cities. I quote from that article; "To go to Harlem and tell kids about camping and snakebites is not talking about reality. Reality is subway trains, buses, rat bites and neighborhood cleanups."

And lest we get too harsh on the cities, let me remind you of what Emerson wrote - "The city is recruited from the country" and of Wheelock's

synergistic view, "for the earth that breeds the trees breeds cities too, and symphonies." We now know that we each need each other and the message must be clearly and loudly articulated - that we have to offer outdoor education in both environments.

How many of you were at the NYSOEA meeting recently at the Stevensville? It was a lovely meeting, but I say it served the needs of hundreds of rural teachers, but not the needs of urban school kids. What were the workshops - where was the emphasis? Exploring a bog! Rock climbing skills! Wildlife photography! Realistically, this is about last on a priority list for urban children. The truth is that rural kids know these lessons, it comes to them instinctively. City kids are not in touch with these items.

In a draught, farm kids know what happens to the crops - they know what happens when the well goes dry - if a stream is polluted, they see their fish dying. At a power outage, they know that you have to hook up a generator somehow in order to run the milking machines. Contrast this to city children - whose water source is the faucet - who see so little green that they don't know that rain is needed - who have no streams and ponds - no bogs to examine or mountains to climb.

The message is clear - the resources and facilities for outdoor education must be within the experiential background of the kids; it must be relevant to their daily living needs. In the cities, for example, it must focus on urban pollution problems, no, not even that, it must focus on all aspects of urban life - pollution, transportation, economics, the whole range of life quality. In my mind, a field trip that takes city kids on a tour of corporate headquarters of three major employers of young people is more valid as an outdoor education experience than field trips that examine forest succession in the

Adirondacks. A field trip that examines the economic impact of subway graffiti would be important for city kids. An outdoor education experience that takes children into the cavernous hold of an oil tanker in for repairs at the Brooklyn Navy yard is equally as important as one which examines watershed erosion problems at the headwaters of the Hudson. After that visit, they'll understand the impact of an oil spill.

And what is important - these are not mutually inconsistent. Experiences in the natural environment and in the man-made environment must be made available to all children. So, what has to be done - a kind of mix and match.

1. Urban outdoor education camps must be developed - just like what is planned for Gateway, where kids can stay for 2, 3 or 4 days to study that environment. The camps can take many forms - even a floating camp, where kids live, as it plies the rivers and harbors of the big cities as a floating camp and schoolroom.

2. Exchange programs bring rural kids into these city camps and vice versa. I don't mean to discourage taking city children away to country camps, but we must help to establish an urban-rural dialogue so that children grow up with a broader view of problems.

3. We must educate a new breed of outdoor educators, such as you, who are equally as comfortable in the outdoor setting whether it be in the country or inner city. You must be trained with the skills of salesmanship, so that school boards will not dismiss your suggestions as frivolous or non-essential.

4. We must refine, and qualify, and evaluate outdoor education skills which we claim contribute to better reading and writing and other basic education skills. We've claimed for many years that kids can learn all kinds of basic education from outdoor experiences, but we've never really proved it.

5. We must develop some recreation skills and facilities which can flourish in the inner city. The NYC Marathon is a case in point - something well-planned and well-conceived will prosper - we've proven that. The NYC Marathon is now the most prestigious in the world. What about sailing in the harbors and rivers - it's underway - why not canoeing on the Hudson, snow shoeing and cross country skiing in the public parks and golf courses, what about climbing walls, and city hiking trails, and city orienteering courses - the list is endless.

Finally, let me address myself briefly to outdoor recreation as differentiated from outdoor education. I sometimes am alarmed that fun is taken out of recreation. All children, and particularly city children, need to be exposed to the great potential that exists for them in the outdoors, away from the ugliness and crush of tenements and the rumblings of the subway. The American concept of the open field for running and exploring, the wandering brook and inviting trees to climb are replaced by the dodging of automobiles and the climbing of abandoned buildings.

And, this must be addressed directly and vigorously. It sounds inconsistent perhaps and I don't have any easy solutions, except to say that we must pursue this goal with an evangelical zeal. Until the city's parks and lakes and recreation facilities can accommodate these activities for city children - we must cajole, plead, argue and fund a whole series of experiences which will at least expose kids to these fun things - promote and encourage scouting, YMCA work, school camping, settlement house excursions - creative new games, inner city camping, fishing trips, swimming clinics, etc. all intended to familiarize city children with the potential that exists for

fun and recreation in the natural outdoors.

Perhaps L.B. Johnson best summarized the hopes of all of us city dwellers when in speaking to the A.A.S.A in 1966, he said, "Tomorrow's schools will provide education for all citizens. It will not close its doors any more at 3 o'clock. Tomorrow's schools will reach out to the places that enrich the human spirit....to the museums, the theater, the art galleries, to the parks and rivers and mountains." Outdoor education can put man into the parks and rivers and mountains of which L.B.J. spoke, and do it in such a way as to be in concert with man and both of the environments which sustain him - the natural and the man-made.

I suggest that we can put man and woman into the parks and rivers and mountains equipped with the skills that will enable them to enjoy them to the fullest, and to preserve them as recreational resources for their children.

Moreover, outdoor education, as I perceive it, can put man and woman into the streets and canyons of our cities, and do it in such a way as to jolt them to the realization that they must improve their cities and create a type of urban beauty to match the beauty of nature which we all feel we have a right to enjoy.

Until man and woman understand how to treat their parks and rivers and mountains and their cities - with care and reverence - to preserve them - to nurture and protect them - so that they will contribute to a lifestyle which glorifies both nature and man, we, as educators, will have fallen far short of helping children to benefit most from the full potential of American Education. That is the urban challenge which faces us!